EVENING HOURS AMONG THE DEAD:

An Elegy,

WRITTEN IN DUFFIELD CHURCHYARD,

DERBYSHIRE,

BY

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Also,

"A NUPTIAL ODE ON THE MARRIAGE OF H.R.H. THE PRINCE OF WALES,"

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PREFACE.

Duffield, though reft of nearly every grace
That once was thine, I still delight to trace
The scenes among whose beauties in life's spring
I rambled joyously, and loved to sing;
And 'neath the Elm trees, where on high the wind
Such music breathes as suits the pensive mind,
Full many a draught of inspiration drank,
From Britan's gifted Bards on Derwent's bank,
Where the tall trees whose branches spreading wide,
Have been my constant haunt at eventide;
Amid whose foliage I, entranced, first heard
The song of night's sweet melancholy bird,
Where the green fields which I so oft' have trod,
Musing on Nature's works and Nature's God,
And deemed my cup of earthly pleasure full,
All seemed so good and all so beautiful.
Yes! there amid thy fields t'was mine to roam,
In childhood's hours around my humble home;
And 'mid my reveries felt desire grow strong,
To pour my happy feelings into song.

All, all are passed, yet memory, in her store,
Fondly preserves them, and still ponders o'er
Their varied charms, while to her tranquil eye
Each scene appears fresh as in days gone by.

And now my muse so rarely known to roam
For themes beyond the confines of her home,
Spread wide thy wings, and chant thy little lay,
E're night's dark curtain closes in the day.

EVENING HOURS AMONG THE DEAD.

A solemn knell tolls at the close of day,
  For some one whose short race of life is run;
While I, a lowly Bard, do wend my way,
  To muse in yonder mead, 'ere day is done.

See down yon narrow hill a labourer comes,
  Whistling amid the trees his humble strain;
His children meet him at his rural home,
  Well pleased to see their Father once again.

Beneath the spreading Elm tree's solemn shade,
  A group of children sit to tell their tale;
How oft' hath it a trysting place been made,
  By those who sleep in Duffield's hallowed vale.

Now comes a weary angler by the stream,†
  See how he stops and gazes, wondering o'er
The narrow graves where sleeps in peace serene,
  The partner of his joys and woes no more.

† The River Derwent runs at the foot of the church-yard.

See! from the grave-yard comes an aged pair,
Sorrowing deeply as they wend their way;
Ah! they have been to weep in silence there,
For one whom death called unprepared away.

Now changes fast the lovely scene around,
The Landscape fades o'er yonder hills forlorn;
And here I muse in Duffield's hallowed ground,
While golden clouds hang o'er the hills of Quorn.*

Now drops the Evening mantle o'er my head;
How still, how solemn is the Evening hour,
When standing mid the dwellings of the dead,
I recognise their forms by heavenly power.

No voice is heard, but all is calm and still,
No stranger comes to mar the poet's theme;
The lowing cattle on yon neighbouring hill,
Accompany the music of the stream.

Hark! in its solemn note the clock strikes nine,
In the tall spire I hear its echoing tone;
How oft' have ears, as lowly born as mine,
Heard the same peel, who now in death are strown.

Now flies a Bat, with fluttering wings o'er head,
Roused by strange feet, perhaps, from her domain,
She wonders why the living 'mong the dead,
Should muse and thus molest her quiet reign.

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* A Village on the hill, one mile west of Duffield.

The Moon in splendour rises o'er Edge Hill,*
Illuminating every hill and dale;
The humble cottages† are standing still,
Where many an aged peasant tells his tale.

Where blithesome children sit around the fire,
Listening with wonder to the tales of yore,
Pulling the grey locks of their aged sire,
Whose days of pilgrimage are nearly o'er.

Beneath the spreading Yew tree's solemn shade,
There lies beneath the rising grassy heap,
An aged Pastor,¶ one whose peace was made
With God, so with God's people now doth sleep.

Ah! yes, beneath those grassy rising heaps,
Beloved ones known to me, now sweetly rest,
They with their ancient ancestors now sleep,
And cares of earth no more their peace molest.

Ah! there, before the ancient gateway, nod
Those ten tall poplars,‡ shivering in the breeze,
Thousands have passed them there to worship God,
Who now lie here, reposing and at ease.

Ah! ye are silent now ye sons of toil,
Ye who did once my native village grace,
Ye mouldering lie within the hallowed soil,
And others far less brave now fill your place.

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* Edge Hill Towers, the seat of J. Lewis, Esq.

† The Author's Home.

¶ Rev. W. Barber, 39 years Vicar of Duffield.

‡ The poplars called the ten lepers.

No more shall ye arise to till the soil,
  No more arise to drive the heavy plough,
No more shall wife and children on ye smile,
  Till ye shall meet with crowns upon your brow.

O stand abashed ambitious sons of earth!
  Stoop low and read the Epitaph—obscure;
Be silent then, nor let the voice of mirth,
  Break in to mar the joys of humble poor.

O ye! who boast of greatness and of fame,
  Ye Lords and Nobles of my native land,
Learn here to read how lowly was your name,
  When fortune took and led you by the hand.

And ponder o'er life's little fleeting day,
  Your health, your beauty, all you call your own,
Your deeds of glory soon will die away,
  And you be left a lifeless corpse alone.

And you, ye proud, who now the poor disdain,
  Ye, from whose hands the poor an alms doth crave,
Stoop here and read, your Epitaph is plain—
  "Your riches cannot save you from the grave.

Live as you like, but die at length you must,
  No deeds of glory can recall the breath;
The voice of greatness cannot move the dust,
  To give to nature those who sleep in death.

Ah! yonder lies in that neglected spot,
A heart once filled with holy living fire,
And though he's dead, he is not yet forgot,
We often think of him† with warm desire.

No marble slab nor letters writ in gold,
No deeds of valour done by him are given;
But writ in blood, redeemed in Jesus' fold,
His humble name is registered in heaven.

He had no knowledge, but true wisdom's page
Through his sad life did to his sight unroll;
And as the cares of this dark world engage,
A holy influence sustained his soul.

Full many a star is hid behind a cloud,
Shining in splendour, though to us unseen,
Till death draws o'er those lowly ones his shroud,
And leaves their memory ever fresh and green.

How many a son of humble parents born,
Hath ris'n to greatness and made others rise,
To blossom in this wilderness forlorn,
Then shed immortal fragrance in the skies.

Ah! who can tell that very near me lies,
Amongst the graves of Duffield's sleeping poor,
The man who had an Angel's sympathies,
Who while he lived above himself could soar.

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† A Good Christian Peasant.

A Wellington, that never fought on plains;
  A Cowper, that did not his thoughts rehearse;
'Tis possible as great as were these names,
  As great lie here unknown by deed or verse.

Perhaps a lowly Bard, whose genius bright
  Oft' set the cottage table in a roar,
Died, and his genius sunk from human sight,
  His name forgotten, known to earth no more.

Death drags us head-long down the awful steep,
  While shivering mortals stand in awe to gaze;
The gates of mercy close on those who sleep,
  Who might have died to live to heaven's praise.

But dread of pain, and craven fear to die,
  Took from the marble cheek its wonted smile;
The gates of hell before them open fly,
  The guilty takes the wages of his guile.

Here lie the hearts which ached for others' woe;
  Here lie the arms which ever loved to bear
Like lambs, the timid, quench the tears that flow,
  Bind up the broken heart, and soothe its care.

O ye! who live a life of care below,
  Ye all may make your names immortal here;
Do what you can to ease a brother's woe,
  And shed for lost humanity a tear.

Those noble are, who not at heart confined
  To gifts and graces, but of grace alone
Who open wide their hearts to all mankind,—
  These, these, shall sway the sceptre of a throne.

Far from this cold dark wilderness of strife,
  Within their narrow cells beloved ones lie;
They walked with God while in this mortal life,
  To reign as spirits now with Christ on high.

How happy they who while on earth they roam,
  Rejoice to follow Jesus in the way,
Which leads them by the sweet still waters home,
  Where God doth wipe each falling tear away.

Their names live registered on moss clad stones—
  The name, the date, and humble verse of rhyme,
Mark the deep graves where rests the pilgrim's bones,
  There let them rest through the long range of time.

Mark well ye giddy throng, who oft' are led
  To visit those whose place ye now supply;
Learn while ye linger here amongst the dead,
  That you are not at all too young to die.

Ah! you have lingered by a dying bed,
  And you have followed in the mournful train;
You have laid within the silent grave a head,
  Which you have often caused to throb with pain.

In some dear breasts the memory of the dead
  Is blest and sacred, thought of but with tears;
A charm of sweetness o'er their lives was shed,
  Now immortality doth crown their years.

Once in a noble mansion by the road,
  There lived a veteran* of the days gone by;
And all who needy, thronged to his abode,
  Whose generous bounty would their wants supply.

But now he sleeps beneath the old Yew tree,
  He sleeps in peace, near to the Vestry door;
O! Thornbury, when e're we think of thee,
  Lament thy useful life so soon was o'er.

How often at the close of summer's day,
  Riding at random on his faithful steed,
Amid the lanes where children loved to play,
  The village squire† his homeward way would lead.

He was a man of noble heart and soul,
  A father kind, a friend sincere and true,
Cautious and candid—upright, just, and bold,
  As e're old Duffield in her life time knew.

But now he sleeps in Duffield's sacred Fane,
  Gone from the toils of busy life awhile;
Those who bemoan him, hope to meet again,
  To share with him the resurrection smile.

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* Horatio Nelson Thornbury, Esq., M.R.C.S.
† John Balguy, Esq., Q.C., &c.

That steeple, grey with age, hath braved the storm
And wreck of times—all changing scenes around—
Hath stood to witness to its own reform,
And to give verdict to its doctrines sound.

Ah! there, within the memory of some,
The tunes were chalked on board, and held to view
From the old loft they called "the singing room,"
The favourite strains which our forefathers knew.

There "Sam the Glover" led the village choir,
And "Dawson" played upon the violin,
And James, the worthy gardener to the Squire,
Boasted he knew the key each tune was in.

There the old Sexton as he tolled the bell,
Would look devout, and with a pious air,
Remind each boy and merry looking girl,
That they were in the solemn house of prayer.

There would the village lasses, two by two,
March modestly, but blushing, down the aisle,
And "curtsey" as they passed the Squire's pew,
Well pleased to share his kind and ready smile.

How strangely altered art thou Duffield dear,
Lo these few years what changes have been made;
Those who once laughed, now shed the bitter tear,
To see their friends laid in the silent shade.

O hearts that loved me, voices dear and sweet,
  Faces all radient with immortal bloom;
Ye all are watching from your blissful seats,
  While human nature courts the empty tomb.

O cruel death! but ah! it must be so,
  Worms of the earth from cherished hopes are riven;
How happy he who if his present woe,
  But makes him seek an interest in heaven.

Beam brightly silver Moon o'er this lone spot,
  Cheer my lone heart, disconsolate and low;
Beam brightly o'er yon (humble) low roofed cot,
  Where live the hearts that bind me here below.

O cast thy brightness o'er me many years,
  Witness, O heaven! this my heart's request,
Be thou my guide while in this vale of tears,
  And give a heavy laden worm thy rest.

Now wanes the Moon, behind a cloud away,
  Gently the clouds of blackness gather round,
And twelve deep tones proclaim the close of day,
  Yet here I am in Duffield's hallowed ground.

O sacred place! I fain would linger still,
  And learn the lesson of departed men;
But while I linger, pain my breast doth fill,
  I may not tread this hallowed spot again.

Now wandering by the Derwent's stream alone!
  No voice disturbs the solemn hush of night.
My lay is ended, and my task is done;
  Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

Live on, live on, while moments steal away,
  Live while you live, for soon will cease your breath;
The short lived pleasures of life's fleeting day,
  Will only leave you in the arms of death.

THE END.

J. ACWORTH, PRINTER, EALING